

CHAPTER SIX: FAITH

6.1 FAITH

6.1.1 – Faith is a **gift** of God. Faith needs to be constantly renewed and strengthened in communal worship and fellowship. Faith is **trust** in God. Faith involves **personal repentance** of sin, **acceptance** of Jesus Christ as saviour, **commitment** to him as Lord. Faith also includes **assent** to the truth of the gospel which is that God knows, loves and pardons us.

6.1.2 – Faith comes in at least 4 different ways. 1) We may have trusted in God from childhood. 2) Faith may have come later in life. 3) Faith may come suddenly. 4) faith may come after a struggle to believe. All of these ways and many others are legitimate, and God honours them all.

6.1.3 – God is already here. Faith is not only sight, but also a saying yes to God, a welcoming of God and an engaging of God who is in our midst.

6.2 DOUBT

6.2.1 – This section seems to suggest that God is the source of our doubting by calling us to live in the world without experiencing God's presence. Does this make sense to you?

Often we discern God's presence as we look back. Have you ever experienced this in your life?

At other times, we're told, God seems absent in order that our faith may be tested. Now, our faith may be tested and God may seem absent, but is this God's doing?

We may mature through such struggle, but is this the purpose of doubt? Is there a purpose in it, or is purpose found through it?

Hard circumstances come in life, but is this God's doing in order to chasten and strengthen us?

6.2.2 – The working through of doubt and questioning is an essential part of our growth in faith. But this section also says that questioning can be disobedience. How is that? Is doubt a weakness or is it a strength? Is questioning ever a bad thing?

6.2.3 – When we are assailed by doubts and our faith is weak, we can find strength and certainty by Christ's word, the experience of the sacraments, and the movement of the Holy Spirit. What do you think?

CHAPTER SEVEN: GOD'S CHURCH

7.1: THE CHURCH

7.1.1 – The church is Christ together with his people. Christ is the key ingredient that makes the gathering and fellowship of people a church. The quality of church is connected to the quality of our devotion to and service in the name of Christ.

The next four statements are related to the traditional 'marks of the church' which are four.

7.1.2 – The church is **one**. Even though the church is not one in organization, denomination, style, and even doctrine, the church is one in its declaration of Jesus Christ as Lord.

For Roman Catholics, traditionally, to be one church would also mean to be under the rule of the pope. This is why holy communion is not shared with other Christians at the moment unless they embrace the rule of the pope. For us Presbyterians, however, we do not see our denomination as superior or more right than any others. We are a particular expression of the church of Jesus Christ, different yet equal before God. We welcome anyone to the Lord's table who embraces the way of Jesus.

7.1.3 – The church is **holy**. To be holy is to be set apart in righteousness, goodness and moral integrity. But is the church particularly holy? It should be, and yet... But what is true holiness in a world of sin and moral failure? Isn't it honesty, confession, humility and openness to forgiveness as those who are forgiven? We need to redefine what we think of as holy.

7.1.4 – The church is **catholic** (Latin word meaning: universal). How catholic is the church in its approach, attitude and openness to others?

7.1.5 – The church is **apostolic**. We are conscious that we follow in historic continuity with the church that began with Jesus' first disciples.

7.1.6 – As Presbyterians, we believe that sin affects everyone, the church included. Do all churches and denominations believe this about themselves?

How do we determine when 'The Word is truly preached, the sacraments rightly administered' and when the church rightly 'orders its life according to the word of God.'?

7.2: MINISTRY

7.2.1 – The ministry of the church is the ministry of Jesus Christ. As Christians our ministry is true ministry only as a participation in the ministry of Jesus Christ. To minister is to serve. We all have 'gifts' with which to serve in the ministry of Christ.

7.2.2 – There are also particular gifts and ‘special tasks’ that are required for a church to function as a church. These tasks serve the building up of the church as a church.

7.2.3 – Ministers are ‘set apart’ to do three things in particular: Preach the gospel, administer the sacraments, and exercise pastoral care. Ministry is a conscious continuity of a task begun with the first disciples of Jesus who became called apostles. Both men and women are called to serve in this task of ministry.

7.2.4 – The ‘office of ruling elder’ is a distinctive task recognized in Presbyterian churches. Other churches organize themselves differently. Elders are chosen by the people, they are male and female, and they share in the leadership of the church equally with ministers. There is no hierarchy in Presbyterian churches, only different tasks. The minister is a teaching elder. Other elders are called ruling elders.

7.2.5 – There are other ministries in the church, and once again, these are different tasks with no hierarchy attached. And once again, men and women are called equally to such tasks.

7.2.6 – The work of Christ is a collective enterprise.